

CONFIDENTIAL

NIO - 617/77

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

Executive Registry

77-770

National Intelligence Officers

SP - 73/77
18 March 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Howard Stoertz, Jr.
National Intelligence Officer for Strategic Programs

SUBJECT: Suggested Response to Possible Questions about Backfire
Performance on "Face the Nation"

1. During your appearance on Face the Nation on Sunday, you may be asked to comment on the press report of General Wilson's testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Arms Control concerning the potential of Backfire for intercontinental operations. The basis for the question might be Henry S. Bradsher's column in the Washington Star, March 16, 1977, which stated:

"Wilson also declared that the Soviet TU26 Backfire bomber 'has a significant intercontinental range potential.'"

"The Backfire's range has been a controversial point in Washington. The Soviet Union has insisted in strategic arms limitation talks--SALT--that the plane is only a medium bomber. But some government officials have argued that its potential range means it must be included in any new SALT agreement."

2. In considering your response you should bear in mind that the official US position at SALT has been that Backfire has capabilities comparable to the Bison heavy bomber, and thus, Backfire should be counted as a heavy bomber. We are not aware of any public acknowledgement by US officials of the recent CIA estimate that Backfire is not comparable to the Bison and has very marginal capabilities for operations against the United States. However, CIA agrees with DIA and Air Force that Backfire has inherent capabilities for intercontinental operations. It probably would be best for your answer to questions on this subject to be independent of individual agency views.

3. The following is suggested as an unclassified response:

"The secrecy with which the Soviets surround their military programs has required that we make technical assessments of the Backfire performance using largely indirect evidence to estimate those technical characteristics which determine its range, such as gross weight, wing

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DDI

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Sayre: I did not show this to DDCI, as it came to us after the fact; but I thought you might be interested in what the NIO's suggest be our public position on BACKFIRE.

A/DDCI

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(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

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